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March 2007

INSIGHT FOR RESTAURANT EXECUTIVES

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Arby's beefs up the menu beyond beef.

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How Taco John's got through its E. coli outbreak.

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Trading Up

Red Lobster plays up its seafood expertise to improve its image.

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Kim Lopdrup,
president,
Red Lobster

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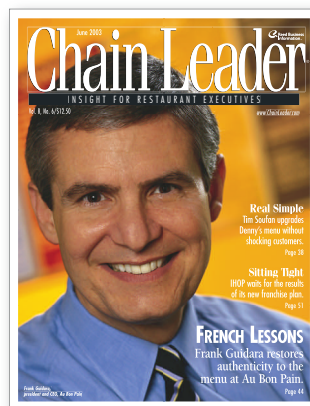


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Degree of DIFFICULTY



Uno CEO Frank Guidara seeks discipline in a tough casual-dining environment. **By Mary Boltz Chapman**

Frank Guidara graced the cover of *Chain Leader* in June 2003, when he was working to restore authenticity to the menu and the service—the Frenchiness—at Au Bon Pain. In February 2005, he became CEO of Uno Chicago Grill when Centre Partners acquired a majority interest in the Boston-based casual-dining chain, which at the time had been expanding from its pizzeria roots.

When you joined Uno, what did you want to do first?

It was doing very, very well, and my focus was on making it a more compelling offer, a more compelling concept for people to want to go to; strengthen up the food and the service; and take what was and add to it so that as people had choices for casual dining, they might want to go to Uno's more often.

What separates it from its casual-dining competitors?

The thing that we've been working on is proprietary items—items that are unique to Uno's. We have some different kinds of cooking equipment in the restaurant so that we can think outside the box.

I understand that when you were changing training in the units, you encouraged the cooking staff to learn the server positions and the server staff to learn the cooking positions.

Typically in restaurants there is a lack of appreciation for the difficulties of the other person. It's the psychology of understanding the other person's job and appreciating what they're going through and appreciating when it's right.

You talked about psychology of understanding and your foodie background, but at the corporate level you brought a discipline to Uno, which seems

like the other side of the brain.

In the restaurant business, the only way you can really guarantee the guest experience is with a tremendous amount of discipline in the restaurant. And it starts from the time the car pulls up to the curb, to the time the car pulls out of the curb. You think about everything that takes place in between.

How are your expansion plans developing?

This will be one of our best years in a number of years. But we have slowed the company down because we're focusing on making sure that we're doing everything right. And the only way you can do that really is just keep focusing on your existing business.

When you look ahead, what do you see that's exciting?

Well, all the problems that we're faced with today. I see that as exciting. I mean this whole nutrition thing, the food-safety thing—I see that as very exciting because whenever you have problems like that, it causes people to get creative. The consumer knows more about food and is demanding better food, which puts pressure on organizations to provide it.

This business is so much more complex than it was five years ago, 10 years. I think back 20 years ago—the problems we were dealing with then were nothing compared to today. That's pretty exciting.

You're an optimist.

Well, I do like a degree of difficulty. ■

on the web: For more on Guidara's efforts to maintain Uno's discipline while encouraging creativity, download or read the entire interview at www.chainleader.com.

The Chain Leader Cover Society is made up of the executives who have appeared on the cover since the magazine's debut in August 1996. This occasional feature updates readers on a Cover Society member.



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INSIGHT FOR RESTAURANT EXECUTIVES

Vol. 12, No. 3/March 2007



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Trading Up 38

President Kim Lopdrup is on a mission to reinvigorate Red Lobster's sales and guest counts. The plan calls for playing up the chain's seafood expertise by rolling out a fresh fish menu, designing new prototypes and simplifying operations.

By David Farkas

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By Lisa Bertagnoli

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Taco John's implemented a comprehensive crisis-management plan it started developing in 2005 after an E. coli outbreak affected three units in Minnesota and Iowa.

By Mary Boltz Chapman

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How to Grow to 100 Units

- Web-exclusive content and related articles on growing concepts
- Video coverage of *Chain Leader's* "How to Grow to 100 Units" roundtable
- California Tortilla's Pam Felix on the trials and joys of growing her spunky concept

Plus

- Senior Editor David Farkas muses about the industry in his blog, Dave's Dispatch
- Daily news
- Franchise opportunities
- Topic-specific pages on marketing, expansion, operations and more

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Comp and CIRCUMSTANCE

Successful executive compensation is aligned with corporate goals.



Mary Boltz Chapman
Editor-In-Chief

We talk a lot about how to retain and compensate employees at the restaurant level. It's so important that *Chain Leader* dedicates a whole issue of the magazine to the topic every April, using People Report's help and its Survey of Unit Level Employment Practices to present the industry's best practices.

But a recent company conference and a report called "Effective Long-Term Incentive Plan Design Within the Chain Restaurant Industry" from David Mansbach, managing director of HVS, an executive search and consulting firm based in Mineola, N.Y., has me thinking about executive compensation and retention.

Missing Opportunities

In his report issued in February, Mansbach notes that he sees many companies that don't align long-term executive rewards with company objectives. At first you might be surprised. Of course executives are rewarded when objectives are met. They're the ones responsible for meeting them.

But perhaps some leaders just *think* their goals and their team's rewards are in sync.

You have to know what your company's goals are first. If they're not clear, quantifiable and easy to communicate, it's difficult to base performance on them. For example, if your mission is to deliver the best customer experience in casual dining, the metrics you should use to compensate executives are different than if your goal is to deliver every pizza in 30 minutes or less.

Everyone in your company needs to know your mission and goals, too, and the best way to communicate them is to walk the talk. Companies whose top executives are true to their own mission not only retain their leadership, they attract top talent as well.

When tying compensation to organizational goals, don't be skimpy. But often the

best employees are not in it just for the paycheck. They want to serve a higher purpose, have fun, be challenged. This requires you to be creative. Promise a luxury trip for accomplishing a task. Put an ad in the paper congratulating the team on its efforts. Let a star choose which nonprofit organization receives a donation equivalent to his or her bonus.

Meanwhile, help those who aren't stellar to improve, but give up if they're not performing or not responding to development efforts. I know this isn't true in your organization, but at some companies, executives whose performance suffers get promoted up and out of the way. If those slipping executives' compensation slipped as well, they'd shape up or find another company to settle into.

Don't Aim for 100 Percent

One last thought. Turnover isn't all bad, even when good workers leave. Sometimes an executive's ability grows faster than the opportunities you can offer. Wish them well and know they'll always appreciate what they learned from your organization. Turnover also allows you to let in new blood with fresh perspectives.

Find and focus on your top performers at all levels. They might be hiding among your administrative staff or in a regional office. Get them ready now for smooth transitions when people do leave.

If you have a strong, focused company, strong, focused executives will want to work for you. Creative challenges and compensation will help keep them there. ■

I welcome your feedback. Contact me at
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"*Chain Leader LIVE* has been very informative. The takeaways I look for about leadership and chain management I'm finding here at *Chain Leader LIVE*."



Scott Hughes
Vice President of Marketing
Bruegger's Enterprises Inc.

"*Chain Leader LIVE* is a great, informative group of sessions, and the people are very knowledgeable. It's an excellent opportunity to mingle and to meet old friends, share ideas and exchange best practices. I think it would benefit our operations folks to come out here, and probably the technology folks as well."

People you want to meet. Information you need to know.

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Takeaway

- Learn proven, bottom-line-boosting ideas from a who's who of industry executives.
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Shop TALK



Three seasoned restaurant executives are yearning to buy a chain.

By David Farkas

Orlando, Fla.-based Restaurant Acquisition Partners, a “blank check” company, has just 24 months to buy a restaurant chain—or else liquidate and return \$20 million to shareholders. Which explains why RAP President Christopher Thomas, former CEO and president of Sizzler USA, whose partners include former Chart House CEO John Creed and former Long John Silver’s CEO Clyde E. Culp III, is scouring the market for the ideal buy.

What exactly is a blank check company?

It’s a publicly traded buyout company—a public-equity fund that allows its management to raise capital in the public marketplace for the purpose of making an acquisition. I believe we’re the first blank check company run by restaurant executives exclusively to make an acquisition in the restaurant industry.

How much acquisition capital did you raise?

We raised \$20 million, selling shares for \$6 per unit. Each unit was one share of common stock and two warrants with an exercise price of \$4.50.

Private-equity funds operate without many restrictions. What about public-equity funds?

Key restrictions include placing a substantial amount of the offering’s net proceeds in a trust for the benefit of the public investors. The company also has 24 months to complete an acquisition or it’s required to liquidate itself and return the money held in the trust, plus interest. The acquisition must have

a fair market value of at least 80 percent of the offering.

Do you have a chain in mind you want to buy?

Not just yet. We are not in hot pursuit of anything, but we are looking at a lot of things with a sense of urgency to get things done.

What do the three of you like, concept-wise?

We like casual dining and quick casual, with quick-casual chains being the most desirable. It’s fast-growing, and it fits today’s lifestyle—bolder flavors, fresher food, healthier options. There are also more real-estate options available to it and a more modest investment.

Does the Wendy’s/Baja Fresh debacle serve as a warning to buyers of quick-casual chains?

Baja Fresh, like others before it, once again reminded us of the difficulties of making acquisitions from a return-on-investment standpoint. Overpaying is often the most difficult to overcome.

Is there a level of EBITDA you won’t go below?

It’s got to be \$4 million and up.

How many potential deals are you seeing?

Several per week, usually from industry equity funds and investment bankers. Since we’ve announced our partnership, I am getting calls from chains I’ve never heard of.

What’s your biggest selling point?

An important point of differentiation for us is our understanding of the business. We can take a look at concepts in multiple segments of the industry and understand growth potential. For example, say a chain has only built freestanders because management can only visualize their restaurants in front of a Wal-Mart. We might recognize that an end-cap or other site options are possible. ■

“Baja Fresh, like others before it, once again reminded us of the **difficulties of making acquisitions** from a return-on-investment standpoint.”

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Although the first Italian Oven Cafe in Pittsburgh is in a C location, future units will be in A locations. The company is looking for endcaps in upscale suburban shopping centers to target professionals, women and families with young kids.

Second Time AROUND

Jim Frye resurrects Italian Oven as a slimmed-down, fast-casual concept.

By Maya Norris

Jim Frye is not ready to give up on The Italian Oven just yet. The founder of the once successful family-dining chain that crashed and burned in the mid-'90s has relaunched the concept as Italian Oven Cafe, a fast-casual version of the original.

Same but Different

Italian Oven Cafe debuted in 2004 in Pittsburgh after Frye saw the success of fast-casual players like Panera Bread. "We took the original Italian Oven, we skinned down the size of the box, skinned down the investment, skinned down the menu," he says.

The 2,000-square-foot unit cost \$225,000 to open. The European, sophisticated decor includes leather chairs, black marble countertops, blond wood tables, a display kitchen, and track and pendant lighting.

The menu consists of wood-fired pizzas, paninis, salads and pastas, driven by the principles of the Mediterranean diet. Best-sellers include Grilled Mahi Mahi panini, \$6.25, with provolone cheese and lemon-caper aioli; and Lobster and Shrimp Ravioli, \$9.95, in tomato-basil sauce. A complimentary olive bar features a variety of olives, peppers, vinegars and oils. "We're not a spaghetti and meatballs and sausage and peppers kind of restaurant," Frye says.

Lessons Learned

Frye hopes this version of Italian Oven will fare better than the one he founded in 1989. The company grew to 110 units in 17 states and Australia. But it quickly disintegrated after raising \$21.6 million in an IPO in November 1995. Less than a year later, the company saw the stock price tumble to \$1

a share from a high of \$8 and faced creditor claims of \$7.4 million. It filed for bankruptcy in October 1996. Whitecliff Capital Partners, a Minneapolis-based investment firm, acquired the company for \$3.5 million in 1997 but dissolved it within 18 months. Frye bought the rights to the name in 2004 and is working out licensing agreements with the 20 Italian Ovens still operating.

Frye admits the company went public before it had the earnings, sales and infrastructure in place for aggressive expansion. "If you miss your earnings projections and you don't open up stores in a quarter that you say you're going to because of bad weather or one of your franchisees is stumbling, it becomes a huge problem with Wall Street," he says. "They are unforgiving."

While Frye is not ruling out an IPO for Italian Oven Cafe, he does not see it in the near future. Rather, he is focused on keeping unit economics tight and expenses down as the company prepares to expand.

Future units will average 2,800 square feet to 3,200 square feet and cost \$600,000 to \$750,000. Although they will be more expensive to open than the Pittsburgh unit, which is smaller and located in a C location, Frye says the new units will post at least \$1.8 million per store because they will be bigger and in A locations. He won't reveal the Pittsburgh unit's sales except to say that they are less than \$1.8 million.

Italian Oven will open a unit in West Palm Beach, Fla., this summer. Investigating sites in Arizona and Nevada, the company expects five more units to open in 2008 including one or two company restaurants in West Palm Beach. ■

SNAPSHOT

Concept

Italian Oven Cafe

Headquarters

West Palm Beach, Fla.

Units

2007 Systemwide Sales

\$2 million

(company estimate)

Average Unit Volume

\$1.8 million

(company estimate)

Average Check

\$7.50 to \$8.50

Expansion Plans

1 in 2007, 5 in 2008

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Growing PAINS

Mel's Diner works through the bumps and bruises that hit its life cycle. **By Mary Boltz Chapman**

HOW TO
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UNITS

Mel's Diner is hardly a young concept. It debuted in 1989 in San Carlos, Fla., as a '50s-style eatery focused on family-friendly service, comfort foods and value, expanding to 10 units in southwest Florida. Yet it's been going through the awkward stages of growing from successful local player to chainhood.

Negotiating those stages has meant building a sophisticated corporate structure, revamping the concept and keeping options open.

At a Tipping Point

Founder, President and CEO Chris Karakosta says the culture shift, which included

bringing in district managers to work with unit operators and outsourcing marketing, "was very difficult for our company because we are so family geared." But he felt Mel's needed professional management to continue to grow and provide customers with a high-quality and consistent experience.

Karakosta admits it was a challenge. "When you bring in corporate-level people to come and run these stores, as owner, I had to back off," he says. "I kept an open line of communication, but it seemed the more I got involved, the more difficult it was for the corporate people coming in. It's a balance."

The team also decided that Mel's Diner

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needed updating. Mel's low price points brought in traffic, but its typical diner look and menu told customers not to expect anything special—and today's consumer wants premium brands and indulgences, says Aaron Allen, CEO of Orlando, Fla.-based Quantified Marketing Group, Mel's outsourced marketing firm. "We saw there was a divergence between the direction the concept was going as Mel's Diner and where the consumer market was as a whole on the national level," Allen says.

A rebranded Mel's Gourmet Diner keeps elements of the design, but adds stone and other upscale accents. The menu still focuses on comfort food at a reasonable price, but the ticket time and price point are a little higher due to higher-quality ingredients and better presentation. For example, Mel's Diner offers Breaded Pork Cutlet with applesauce for \$9.49. At Mel's Gourmet Diner, Apple Pecan Crusted Pork Loin comes with cinnamon apples for \$11.95.

"We expect to lose some of our customer base but hopefully gain more on the other end," Karakosta says.

Watch for Curves Ahead

Mel's Gourmet Diner opened in January in Cape Coral, and another will open in Naples in fall. The rest will be converted throughout the year. Expansion will resume in 2008, but Karakosta is not sure yet what it will look like. Parent Creative Restaurant Management opened Big Al's City Grill in Bonita Springs, Fla., in 2004. It's more upscale and made \$4 million in sales last year, as compared to Mel's \$2.5 million. Another Big Al's is slated to open in March in Naples.

"The question will be, which one will we grow at a quicker pace?" Karakosta says. "The option is to grow outside southwest Florida with the company or to create some new brands and stay within our region." If the company grows outside southwest Florida, it will look to franchise. ■

on the web: For more information about how to take a young chain to the next level, visit *Chain Leader's* How To Grow To 100 Units section at www.chainleader.com/how-to-grow.



SNAPSHOT

Concept Mel's Diner/
Mel's Gourmet Diner
Ownership Creative
Restaurant Management,
Naples, Fla.
Units 11
2006 Systemwide Sales
\$25 million
Average Check
\$7.50 breakfast,
\$9 lunch, \$11 dinner
Expansion Plans
1 in 2007, 3 or 4 in 2008

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It's Not Easy Being **GREEN**

Big Bowl sacrifices food cost and purchasing efficiency to reinvent itself as an eco-friendly operator. **By Margaret Littman**

Dan McGowan, president of Chicago-based Big Bowl, is financially savvy, but he is not a penny pincher. Over the last year, he's increased spending—by seven figures—on labor, ingredients and even uniforms to create a stronger brand identity for the Asian concept.

The new Big Bowl is as young and hip as it was when it first opened 13 years ago, but now has an environmentally friendly and natural bent. Such a focus should strengthen Big Bowl's position with Generation Y diners. Research from Cone Inc. and AMP Insights found 83 percent of these young diners would trust a company more if it is socially or environmentally responsible.

Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises created the casual-dining Chinese and Thai restaurant in 1994. In 2001, LEYE sold Big Bowl to Dallas-based Brinker International. But Brinker wasn't successful at expanding Big Bowl because it didn't appreciate the concept's urban vibe, according to McGowan. So, in March 2005, LEYE bought the concept back.

Natural Resources

Since then McGowan has led a team to rebrand Big Bowl. Over two-and-a-half months they tested dishes, re-evaluated ingredients and procedures, and overhauled the menu. Big Bowl began roasting and grinding peanuts in-house for peanut sauces. It started purchasing heirloom pork from small producers, hormone-free chicken, organic fair-trade coffee and local produce.

The company is also trying to use as much seasonal produce as possible, sourcing from organic and local farmers and co-ops. As much as 60 percent to 70 percent of the menu is now all-natural, organic or local. Up next: all-natural beef.

"I don't think anybody in our price point is doing this much," McGowan says. While prices of these ingredients are almost double what Big Bowl used to pay—increasing food costs by 2 percent, or about \$500,000 annually systemwide—menu prices have inched up \$1 or \$2.

McGowan knows it takes more than all-natural meats and local produce to make a

Big Bowl's build-your-own-stir-fry bar is chock-full of local produce. Units in Minnesota get their veggies from different farmers than those in Illinois.

Big Bowl President Dan McGowan thinks having signage in the "dead front" of the restaurant has helped educate diners about the concept's commitment to organic and natural ingredients.



The Big Bowl vibe is designed to be more urban than its Pan-Asian counterparts.

Niman Ranch heirloom pork is one of the natural ingredients used at Big Bowl. The high-quality pork ties in with the traditional Chinese belief that pigs are a symbol of prosperity.

Food costs are up 2 percent since Big Bowl began using local and all-natural ingredients.

restaurant “green” in consumers’ eyes. Not all concepts that become eco-friendly get the good will that goes along with it. “Companies that do it on their own can be accused of ‘greenwashing,’” cautions Michael Oshman, executive director of the Green Restaurant Association.

While Big Bowl has yet to undertake efforts like composting organic waste, the chain is looking at back-of-the-house options for saving water and natural gas. It is also evaluating more environmentally conscious alternatives for everything from napkins to light bulbs.

Late last year Big Bowl hired Michael Alan Stein, a Chicago-based designer, to create new uniforms for Big Bowl servers that are made of eco-friendly fibers.

“I’m not peace and granola,” McGowan says. “But if there are things I can do to make a difference because I am fortunate enough to be in charge of a \$25 million to \$30 million company, then I have a responsibility to do them.”

The Devil’s in the Details

The improvements were possible, in part, because Big Bowl increased spending on labor by an average of \$2,000 per week per store. LEYE reversed a Brinker decision to eliminate the position of chef from the kitchen and

added more hosts, hostesses and other staff.

“Over the course of a year, that’s almost \$1 million. No public company would ever do that. But it was what I thought we needed to do to bring Big Bowl back,” McGowan says. “Most public companies are bottom-line driven. We are top-line focused. I teach everyone to worry about growing sales, and we’ll figure out a way to make money.”

Between 2005 and 2006, sales at the eight-unit chain increased by \$2.5 million, which McGowan attributes to higher check averages, the LEYE frequent-diner program and other efforts. From 2006 to 2007, the increase will be less dramatic: \$1 million.

In 2008, Big Bowl will open its next unit; the location has not yet been announced, but Scottsdale, Ariz., is being considered. Then the company will add one store every 12 to 14 months.

Sales growth until then will come from increasing Big Bowl’s \$18 dinner tab to \$20 to \$22. McGowan thinks customers will be willing to pay more for organic and natural foods if they are marketed appropriately. In addition to a blackboard at the front of the restaurant, Big Bowl is promoting its new commitment to organic and natural foods with a specials sheet and servers trained to discuss it with diners.

“As Big Bowl morphs from the funky noodle and rice shop it was 10 years ago, we’re getting more adult and sophisticated,” he says. ■

SNAPSHOT

Concept Big Bowl

Ownership

Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, Chicago

Units 8

2006 Systemwide Sales

\$27 million

2007 Systemwide Sales

\$28 million

(company estimate)

Average Unit Volume

\$2.5 million to \$3 million

(company estimate)

Average Check

\$13 lunch, \$18 dinner

Expansion Plans

1 every 12 to 14 months



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Closing the GAP

Arby's Amy Alarcon complements beef sandwiches with new fresh deli items, flavorful wraps and snacks. **By Monica Rogers**

The hat-shaped thought balloons floating over guests' heads in the current "I'm thinking Arby's" ads were designed to show that there's plenty of grazing room in those 10-gallon dreamscapes: Room for old-school Beef 'n Cheddar sandwiches. Room for premium-priced Market Fresh Martha's Vineyard Salads with spinach, romaine, apples, cranberries and almonds. And room for lots of full-flavored snackables in between.

Just over a year into its "something different, something better" brand-strengthening campaign, the Atlanta-based sandwich giant continues to carefully balance core products that appeal to typical 18- to 34-year-old QSR lovers with items targeting fast-food-selective moms and foodies. That's led to Spicy Cajun Fish Sandwiches on one end of the menu board and Fajita Beef Flatbread Melts on the other.

Arby's Market Fresh Reuben—with corned beef or turkey, Swiss cheese, Thousand Island dressing and sauerkraut on thick-sliced toasted marble-rye bread—started as a limited-time offer in April 2005, but quickly became the No. 1-selling item in the Market Fresh category. It moved to core menus in 2006 and inspired a wrap version LTO in December 2006.



Arby's Market Fresh line of salads, sandwiches and wraps is the company's fastest-growing menu category.



Arby's continues to add new wraps. The Southwest Chipotle Chicken version, featured as an LTO last summer, included grilled, additive-free chicken breast, pepper bacon, colby-Jack cheese, red onion, lettuce, tomato and spicy chipotle mayonnaise.

According to Director of Product Development Amy Alarcon, guests continue to want heritage products like Arby's roast beef sandwiches but are showing increased interest in big, more diverse flavors. "We're consistently looking for premium, unique items not typically served in the drive-thru environment," she says.

Balancing Act

Scrupulous balance in menu initiatives is crucial at this juncture in Arby's story. Parent company Triarc's July 2005 acquisition of its largest franchisee, RTM, bumped Arby's company-store totals to more than 1,000

from 233—important as the chain refines operational practices and steps up growth. "RTM had a huge number of territories—22 states—tied up for expansion," explains Michael Gallo, senior research analyst with Albany, N.Y.-based investment-management firm CL King and Associates. "Acquiring them was a natural part of Arby's evolution."

Also in motion, Triarc is expected to spin off its Deerfield asset management companies as part of current corporate restructuring, which would make Arby's a stand-alone restaurant company. With all that in mind, "Arby's foremost focus right now has to be on increasing sales and making the core brand successful," says Dennis Lombardi, executive vice president and food strategist for Columbus, Ohio-based WD Partners.

That means staying squarely in the QSR sandwich game with upgraded mainstream items such as chicken and fish sandwiches, at the same time that Arby's extends the Market Fresh premium-product line, says Gallo. Arby's recent switch to chicken not injected with water, phosphates or fillers was important, says Gallo, because chicken was an underperforming product category for Arby's.

Chicken, Naturally

Launched February 2006, Arby's Chicken Naturals initiative was one of Alarcon's first big projects after coming on board in 2005, tying in nicely to a 19-year career that's included positions at Pollo Tropical, Church's Chicken, Taco Cabana and Burger King. Because the protein is processed without the addition of water, seasoning or phosphates, the chicken tastes better in the finished dish, says Alarcon. The new all-breast-meat chicken is now featured

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Market Fresh Chicken Salad Wrap, with chicken-breast meat, pecans, apples, grapes, mayo and lettuce, **\$4.79**

Market Fresh Reuben Sandwich: choice of thin-sliced corned beef or turkey with melted Swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Thousand Island dressing on toasted marble-rye bread, **\$4.49**

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With bacon, green onion and aged cheddar cheese, Arby's deep-fried Loaded Potato Bites are part of the company's move to add more snacks.



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Arby's will continue to expand its use of additive-free chicken.

more than a dozen ways—as tenders and in wraps, salads and sandwiches.

Arby's savory Southwest Chipotle Chicken Sandwich is the latest item in the line. Tested in January 2006, the limited-time-offer sandwich "drew immediately positive consumer feedback and drove sales," says Alarcon, who will not release specific sales increases. Featured systemwide July through August 2006, the \$3.99 sandwich included customers' choice of deep-fried or grilled chicken-breast fillet topped with pepper bacon, colby-Jack cheese, red onion, lettuce, tomato and spicy chipotle mayonnaise.

The Spicy Cajun Fish Sandwich, in stores through April 8, was developed out of last year's successful fish campaign. The company sold more than 2.5 million pounds of fish during 2006's "2 for \$4" fish sandwich promotion. Adding new news, Alarcon and team developed a spicy Cajun tartar sauce as a sandwich topping option and relaunched

The Martha's Vineyard salad—with diced chicken, cheddar cheese, apples, cranberries, grape tomatoes, toasted almonds and raspberry vinaigrette—was the No. 1 seller in the Market Fresh Salad category in 2006.

the fish promotion in January with choice of Classic Fish Sandwich or Spicy Cajun Fish Sandwich.

Little Bites, Big Focus

Side dishes and snacks are another important focus. Alarcon and her team developed Loaded

Potato Bites, \$2.79 for five pieces and \$4.29 for 10 pieces, to recreate the classic loaded potato as a portable, bite-sized item. The seasoned-potato triangles are filled with bacon, chives and aged cheddar cheese, deep-fried and served with ranch-sour cream dipping sauce.

First launched in 2005 as a limited-time offer, Loaded Potato Bites sold so well that they rolled onto the core menu in January 2006. "[Loaded Potato Bites] rank high on the list alongside mozzarella sticks" on Arby's Sidekickers menu, Alarcon says, but will not quantify sales.

Fresh Opportunities

Arby's Market Fresh line of sandwiches, wraps and salads continues to be the fastest growing component of Arby's menu. Something of a swing player for Arby's, the Market Fresh products are at the top end of Arby's price points. Sandwiches such as the \$4.89 Roast Turkey and Swiss with lettuce, tomato, red onion, mayo and spicy brown mustard are priced \$2 higher than the mainstream Roast Beef sandwich, \$2.49.

But at Arby's fast-casual test concept, Arby's MarketFresh, Roast Turkey & Swiss seems pedestrian next to the Fill Your Bowl salads made by a "salad tosserrie chef" with choice of 30 ingredients, hot-pressed crostini

SNAPSHOT

Concept

Arby's

Headquarters Atlanta

Parent Company Triarc Companies Inc., New York

Units 3,500

2006 Systemwide Sales

\$3.30 billion*

Average Unit Volume

\$900,000*

Average Check \$7

*CL King estimate

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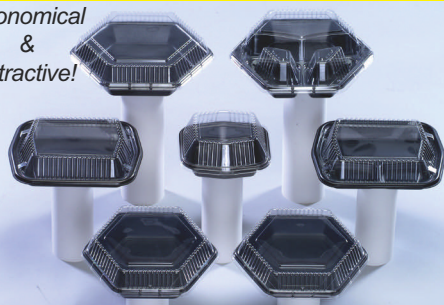
The Beef 'n Cheddar was Arby's No. 1-selling roast beef sandwich in 2006.



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Arby's new Flatbread Melts were developed out of the company's experience with an earlier Market Fresh Gyros limited-time offer. The melts top beef with melted cheese, veggies and sauce.

sandwiches on rosemary-sourdough bread, or oven-toasted ciabatta subs that are also offered there. "At the Arby's MarketFresh test stores, the deli sandwiches and wraps are offered more for guests on the run, but the menu emphasis is on the other items," says Alarcon.

While Arby's plans to expand testing of fast-casual Arby's MarketFresh units, its primary focus for 2007 will rest on the Market Fresh menu category within regular Arby's units.

Thinking Outside the Box

Alarcon, who grew up in North Carolina in a family that gardened and cooked with all sorts of fresh produce, was drawn to the product-development role at Arby's largely because of the nontraditional opportunities the Market Fresh category offered in a fast-food environment. She sees plenty of continued potential for the category. Market Fresh wraps, for example, with their portable nature, have done well since their launch in 2003, although Arby's will not release specifics.

Newest out of the box, Flatbread Melts were developed out of the company's experience with a limited-time offer from April to June 2006: the Market Fresh Roast Beef Gyro, \$2.99. Made with layers of Arby's roast beef seasoned with oregano, lemon, garlic, salt and pepper, topped with tomatoes, lettuce and red onion, and served on warm pita flatbread with cucumber-gyro sauce, the Market Fresh Gyro did well. "But the bread itself did even better," says Corporate Executive Chef Neville Craw. "Guests loved the bread, and we knew there were other ways to extend this with different flavor profiles," agrees Alarcon.

So the development team created two

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Arby's is trying bolder flavors, more portable snack items and fresh deli fare.



To give kids a more healthful option, Arby's added two miniature, crustless versions of its Market Fresh sandwiches in February. They can be bundled with a fruit cup and milk or juice for Arby's Kids Meal, offering an alternative to fries and soda.

flatbread melts, each selling for \$2.99, which were tested in June 2006 and launched in February. The Fajita Beef Flatbread Melt—roast beef with fajita spices, melted pepper-Jack cheese, grilled onions, peppers and jalapeño-ranch sauce—and the Philly Beef Flatbread Melt—with roast beef, melted Swiss cheese, grilled onions, peppers, Parmesan-peppercorn sauce—will be featured through April 14.

Beyond work with Market Fresh wraps, Arby's is expanding healthful options in the category. Salads, for example, are a focus, although Arby's can't comment yet on which new salads it will launch this year.

And providing families with healthier kid-friendly options? Alarcon and team recently developed miniature, crustless versions of Market Fresh sandwiches that can be bundled with a fruit cup and milk or juice for Arby's Kids Meal. "We wanted the kids meal to be healthy, but also to be something that kids would really love," Alarcon explains. Tested in 2005 and launched in February 2006, the mini-crustless options currently include turkey and cheese and ham and cheese.

Moving forward, Alarcon says Arby's will continue to shape marketing initiatives and new product introductions toward a "broader consumer base—especially hard-to-reach young males." ■

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Kim Lopdrup plays up **RED LOBSTER'S** seafood expertise to enhance its image.

Trading UP

SNAPSHOT

Company Red Lobster

Headquarters

Orlando, Fla.

2007 Systemwide Sales

\$2.6 million*

Units 682

Average Unit Volume

\$3.6 million

Average Check

\$17

Expansion Plans

2 to 4 in fiscal 2008,

5 to 10 in 2009

*Oppenheimer estimate;
fiscal year ends May 31

By David Farkas

Red Lobster doesn't have outposts in Maine, or anywhere else in New England for that matter. But tonight that isn't keeping President Kim Lopdrup from imagining a food-related connection to the Pine Tree State. "Maybe a possible culinary center," he muses over a plate of grilled salmon—an item from the new fresh fish menu—in a Red Lobster a few miles from parent Darden Restaurants' headquarters in Orlando, Fla. "Customers tend to perceive we're from Maine."

Still, perhaps aware that he's just made a forward-looking statement, he quickly adds that any center won't be on the agenda for at least two years. For now, Lopdrup is orchestrating phase two of a three-phase plan that includes 16 types of fresh fish, new operations standards and a prototype designed to provide a "refreshing, seaside dining experience" reminiscent of Maine. The 7,200-square-foot eatery, which opened on a mall pad in North Olmsted, Ohio, in September, downplays a nautical theme. Asks Senior Vice President of Development Jo El Quinlan: "How many nautical cues could go away and people still would say, 'It's a seafood restaurant?' That's the push."

These efforts and a raft of others, the goal of which is to reinvigorate sales and guest counts, began when Lopdrup was appointed to the top slot in May 2004. Same-store sales had been tumbling along with guest counts and guest satisfaction scores since fiscal '02, the result of unfocused marketing and discount-heavy promotions. Net income at Darden, which is heavily dependent on Red Lobster's operating profits, dropped 2 percent, to \$232.2 million in fiscal '03 (ended May 31). Then-President Edna Morris resigned in October '03.

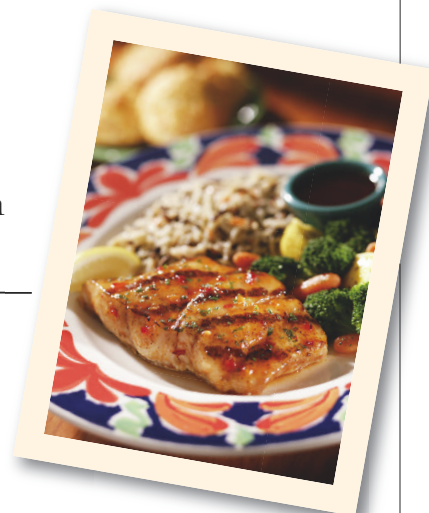
Seafood Behemoth

A few months later, interim-President Richard Rivera hired Lopdrup, a marketing specialist with a Harvard M.B.A., who was working for Allied Domecq's QSR division. As marketing boss, Lopdrup put the kibosh on discounts and began emphasizing the chain's seafood expertise through careful, value-oriented promotions. "We need to compete as a seafood restaurant. That's a fight we win easily because of the competitive advantages we have," he says later in his corner headquarters office, still outfitted with Rivera's furniture.

Those competitive advantages—including arguably the best seafood supply chain in the country—have already put Red Lobster so far ahead of its competitors that "winning" is nearly beside the point. No competitor approaches the 39-year-old chain's 28.2 percent share of the \$8.7 billion the top 10 seafood chains rang up in 2005, according to Technomic Inc., a Chicago foodservice research company. Joe's Crab Shack came the closest in '05 with a 5.2 percent share.

Lopdrup earned the presidency after sales increased in fiscal '04. He then filled key roles in marketing, operations and human resources with executives from Olive Garden, Red Lobster's triumphant sibling, which has posted 49 consecutive quarters of same-store-sales gains following a re-imaging. "Part of my thinking was they helped turn around Olive Garden," Lopdrup says.

Meanwhile, Lopdrup and Executive Vice President of Operations Kelly Baltes, a former operations vice president at Olive Garden, traveled throughout much of Red Lobster's 682-unit empire seeking input from its operators before launching phase one. Feedback convinced them to simplify operations and marketing. They trimmed the



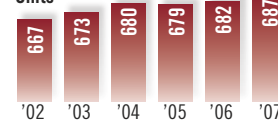
Since 2004, Red Lobster has been upgrading its look and offerings, hoping to recapture the luster lost after unfocused marketing and discount promotions weakened comparable sales and guest counts.

Slow Going

Systemwide Sales
(in billions)



Units



Source: Darden Restaurants; fiscal year ends May 31; *Oppenheimer estimate

Customers still lust for shellfish, like Red Lobster's new Lobster and Seafood Mixed Grill. Lobster tail, scallops, crab and shrimp comprise 87 percent of a unit's sales, officials say.



(From l.) Executive Vice President of Marketing Salli Setta, President Kim Lopdrup, Director of Culinary Operations Michael LaDuke and COO Kelly Baltes.

Research showed Red Lobster didn't get full credit for freshness. Today, grilled fish is one of several menu cues that the seafood giant is finally on trend.

Lopdrup is also changing plateware. The brightly colored china that helped define Red Lobster's Coastal Home period (pictured here) will be replaced by a toned-down solid color.



"We are positioning Red Lobster to be the best seafood restaurant on the planet."

—President Kim Lopdrup

menu by half, made recipes easier to follow, and worked on seating and serving customers more quickly during busy times.

Lopdrup describes phase one's impact on the restaurant-level rank and file as "a bit of a cultural change from the way we used to operate." Baltes, however, during an operator panel discussion at an industry gathering last year, reportedly said aligning operators with company programs proved to be "a huge challenge."

Strong Start

Whatever the case, the initiatives paid off handsomely. Guest-satisfaction scores climbed to record levels, while same-store sales rose for seven consecutive quarters from fiscal '05 through fiscal '06. Improvements in operations, labor and other cost controls—all part of phase one—led to the highest operating margin, 21.5 percent, in Red Lobster history. Oppenheimer & Co. analyst Michael Smith, who has a "buy" rating on Darden, believes Red Lobster is poised to duplicate Olive Garden's success. "The same opportunity exists," he declares.

Growth has been harder to come by. Sales at Red Lobsters open for more than a year climbed barely 1 percent in the second quarter (ended Nov. 30), and that gain was largely due to pricing and menu mix changes. The chain caught a break in December: Mild weather along with a price hike and a promotion helped deliver an 8 percent increase in same-store sales. Comps rose 3 percent in January while traffic dropped 1 percent. Guest counts, 7 percent below '02 levels, remain problematic.

To be sure, casual dining in general feels Red Lobster's pain. With revenues hampered by increased competition and consumers

looking for deals, full-service operators have put the brakes on unit growth (Red Lobster will open two to four units in fiscal '08), emphasized value and, like Darden, repurchased vast amounts of their own stock to prop up the price.

Buckingham Research analyst Mark Kalinowski, who rates Darden stock a "neutral," nonetheless calls Lopdrup's plan "credible." Although Kalinowski doesn't believe it will produce "gangbuster numbers" like Olive Garden has, even modest same-store-sales gains should allow the seafood giant to be a significant contributor to Darden's earnings, he says.

Lopdrup, of course, is only midway through his plan, though he isn't shy about the result. "We are positioning Red Lobster to be the best seafood restaurant on the planet," he boasts.

It's About Freshness

Enter the new fresh fish program. Although fresh fin fish has been on the menu for a long time, it was rarely, if ever, promoted. It makes up only 13 percent of sales. Shellfish drives the business.

But the word "fresh" is hard to resist these days. Lopdrup frequently describes his mission in terms of creating "fresh, clean, friendly and full" restaurants. The chain's brand promise, which is printed on a laminated card management carries around, notes: "Fresh, delicious seafood prepared with culinary expertise."

Fresh is *really* important when applied to seafood. Red Lobster's research revealed current customers were not giving the restaurants much credit for it despite the company's vaunted global connections and rapid seafood delivery system. "When we looked across the board, we are not perceived as fresh as we could be," allows Executive Vice President of Marketing Salli Setta. Lapsed



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The bar in the prototype features wood floors, trendy lighting and a granite bartop, subtle hints that Red Lobster is no longer just for the senior set.

International Maritime Signal Flags spell out "fresh" in the prototype's booth-dominated dining room.

"The fastest growing markets are in the Sun Belt, and that's where we have the most opportunity."

—President Kim Lopdrup

users told officials they thought Red Lobster was a dated chain that served frozen food.

Last October, the restaurants rolled out a separate fresh fish menu that's printed twice daily and always features five to eight species. Fish orders are grilled, broiled or blackened. Managers can pick from among 16 available species, depending on what sells best in their trading areas, Setta says.

Setta meanwhile hired Director of Culinary Operations Michael LaDuke, former executive chef at Epcot Center in Disney World. In addition to working on promotions, LaDuke is creating up-to-date recipes. Research also showed that customers deemed dishes "fresh" when they contained sauces and herbs. "We are trying to push out flavors beyond butter and lemon," he says. To date, the menu hasn't gone further up the

flavor scale than "sweet and spicy glaze" and "Cajun spices."

"It's really important to signal to people food is freshly prepared," declares Setta, the former Olive Garden executive responsible for creating the Culinary Institute of Tuscany, which added authenticity to that chain's menu. Lopdrup, who can imagine setting up a similar seafood-related school in Maine, calls the fresh fish program "the moral equivalent of CIT."

Fish House

So far, the only physical structure heralding Red Lobster's new direction is a prototype in front of Sears in a Cleveland suburb. A second one opened in Englewood, Calif., last month. The look is a noticeable departure from the bright, Caribbean-influenced Coast-

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"It's been two-and-a-half years since we've run a discount promotion. We don't intend to get on that treadmill again."

—President Kim Lopdrup



The North Olmsted, Ohio, prototype—on a mall pad in front of Sears—is an attempt to downplay the chain's once prevalent nautical theme.

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al Home prototype, which debuted about five years ago. The chain built roughly 50 of them and remodeled dozens of others with its colorful elements.

The current design has been toned down considerably. The booth-dominated interior features dark woods, subdued fabrics, subtle lighting and textured glass. The bar top is granite. Small, framed signal flags surround the room, the only color accents. Outside, a lighthouse-like tower, bright white trim and word graphics ("Fish," "Lobster," "Chowder") are the only nautical clues. "We are trying to achieve a design that's warm, welcoming and up to date—something that's not trendy or fad-dish," explains Quinlan, who designed the prototype.

More changes are in store. The building's next iteration will be 400 square feet smaller, have 14 more seats and cost \$130,000 less. Lopdrup won't disclose its price tag or say if it's meeting return hurdles. "We are very pleased with its results," he allows.

The new restaurant is just one of three designs in test, although the other two haven't been built. "We are working to identify the best possible future," Lopdrup explains, adding that of the two other designs, one is more "pushed out" and geared to lure customers who might have given up on Red Lobster years ago.

Those folks are likely affluent, educated and over 50, a demographic with the greatest propensity to consume fresh fish, according to Setta. Red Lobster, of course, would love to have them back, thereby raising sales and incremental traffic. Yet, like a savvy politician, Lopdrup isn't about to risk his base by making its favorite place to crack crabs and lobsters into an expensive-looking seafood house. "What we need to evaluate is what impact [the design] has on our core users," says the son of Danish immigrants. "That has yet to be determined." ■

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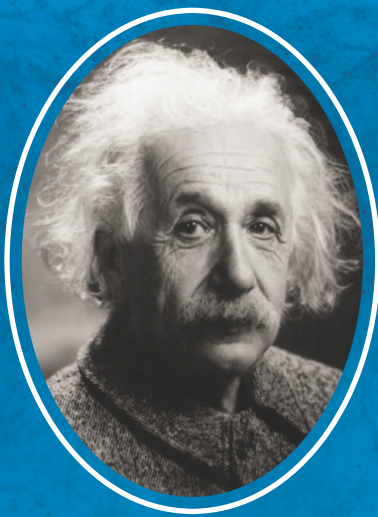
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Menu concept: Turkey Napoleon



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Genius

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Close CONTACT

Regional business directors will help Taco Del Mar expand to new markets around the country. **By Lisa Bertagnoli**



Managing the franchisees of a chain when half its units are in three states is one thing. But as a chain expands nearly 3,000 miles away, franchisee management becomes more challenging.

During the next year, Taco Del Mar will open 120 units, plus add 15 master developers and 100 franchisees to its system. The Seattle-based Mexican QSR also plans to expand in markets as far-flung from the home office as Illinois and Mississippi.

With those plans, it became clear to President David Huether that Taco Del Mar would have to change its system of managing franchisees and master developers. No longer could a few employees at headquarters help franchisees with site selection, building and marketing via telephone and e-mail; no longer could Huether handle field operations.

His plan: Station regional business directors, or RBDs, in markets around the country, and hire a vice president of operations to manage them.

A Geographical Approach

Huether began by hiring a vice president of operations. Bruce Lane, former director of operations at Atlanta-based MCap Restaurant Group LLC (its three brands include Zaxby's) and a one-time Waffle House franchisee, joined Taco Del Mar in January. "It took me six months to find him," Huether says, noting that he was looking for candidates with a mix of multiunit and brand experience in the

United States and overseas.

The second step: reorganizing the RBDs already on staff. Chip Wicks, Tom McDermott and Kym Hagel remain based in Seattle: one handles Canada, Arizona and Nevada; a second, Idaho, Montana, Washington and Oregon; and the third, California, Hawaii and Alaska. The fourth, Chris Doyle, relocated to Chicago to handle the Midwest.

The third step is under way: hiring RBDs for the Southeast and East. Taco Del Mar recently hired Bruce Chaffee to work out of St. Louis, where he'll oversee Puerto Rico, plus the Midwest east of the Rocky Mountains and west of the Mississippi River. Lane says it's not easy to find managers who understand the role of an RBD. "It's not an employer-employee relationship, which is what a lot of people are accustomed to," he says. "We have to have a person who can work with a franchisee in a 100-percent partner relationship."

Good RBDs can be difficult to find, concurs David Mansbach, managing director at HVS Executive Search in Mineola, N.Y. While franchisors look for regional directors, large franchisees want operating partners to do the same job. "Companies are getting that [franchise management] is a critical part of their plan," Mansbach says.

Lane and the RBDs communicate via conference calls, plus phone calls and e-mails several times a day.

Even with constant phoning and e-mailing, Lane travels 40 percent of the time. "Nothing replaces the personal visit with master developers or franchisees, on a personal or professional level," he says.



Taco Del Mar master developers Scott Redlich (l.) and Fred Vosloh plan to open 110 stores during the next 12 years: "It's fortunate these guys know as much as they do," Vosloh says of Taco Del Mar's regional business directors.

(Opposite) Even with the RBD system, Vice President of Operations Bruce Lane says it will be challenging for Taco Del Mar to "roll out the whole brand image" in new markets.



A Personal Touch

Fred Vosloh, master developer for the Gulf South and franchisee of a store in Flowood, Miss., says working with an RBD has helped make his entry into the restaurant business easier. "We're neophytes in this, no two ways about it," says Vosloh, a former software developer.

Vosloh has called on Doyle for help with several issues. When Vosloh discovered that employees were throwing away huge amounts of guacamole, Doyle suggested that employees make the guacamole mix and add avocado only as needed. The restaurant has since cut down on guacamole waste.

Doyle has also helped Vosloh find prime locations in and near shopping malls. "I can't imagine doing this without support," Vosloh says.

Proximity to franchisees is by far the biggest benefit of the RBD system. "We have people closer to our customers, the franchisees," Huether says. "It makes our ability to support franchisees and master developers more effective."

And more effective support means higher profits. "We only get paid because franchisees are successful, and they pay us royalties," Huether says. "That's the only way we make revenue." ■

SNAPSHOT

Concept Taco Del Mar
Headquarters Seattle
Units 229
2006 Systemwide Sales
 \$61 million
Average Check \$7.50
Average Unit Volume
 \$700,000*
Expansion Plans
 150 to 170 in 2007
*Chain Leader estimate

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Despite planning for the worst, Taco John's learned about crisis management the hard way.

By Mary Boltz Chapman

Trial by FIRE

An E. coli outbreak has been traced to your restaurants. It's the stuff that nightmares are made of. But executives at Taco John's were not able to wake up, shake off the bad dream and head into work. The nightmare was real. In November and December, an outbreak affected three units in Minnesota and Iowa, making 81 customers ill; 26 needed to be hospitalized.

Coming on the heels of the fresh spinach recall and outbreak at East Coast Taco Bell units, the incident garnered a lot of media attention. The company was named in two lawsuits (though later dismissed from both). Health officials were able to trace the strain of E. coli to lettuce grown in California, but there are still questions as to how contaminated food got through to customers.

"We were shocked and devastated," says Vice President of Marketing Brian Dixon. "Fortunately, however, we started getting ready two years ago."

Working on Pre-Prep

Executives at the 430-unit, Cheyenne, Wyo.-based chain began a comprehensive vul-

nerability assessment in March 2005. Like most chains, Taco John's has long had an 800 crisis line and manual for franchisees to follow for local incidents. But Dixon says the company wanted to ensure it was prepared in case something happened. It brought in two consultants, one to focus on the corporate headquarters and the other, crises in the restaurants or their markets. About a year ago, the assessment was complete and the team moved to planning.

Key was a communication plan. "What roles do we have?" Dixon says the team asked themselves. "What kind of statements do we make? What kind of facts do we have to gather? What attitude do we have to have to respond quickly? Who speaks?"

Taco John's installed an e-mail blast program and voicemail blast system. "During the height of this unexpected crisis, we were able to have conference calls that at one point involved 290 people on the phone," Dixon says. Franchisees received a quick and consistent message about what they needed to do to assure their customers. Conference calls occurred every three or four days, reinforcing a package of printed information and frequent e-mail updates.

However, the technology was not ready when the incident occurred. According to Dixon, it was about 70 percent developed and had to be finished basically overnight. About 98 percent of Taco John's system is franchised, and it found it did not have up-to-date contact information for everyone. The company is building a system in which franchise support in the field can easily keep their operators' information current.

SNAPSHOT

Concept Taco John's

Headquarters

Cheyenne, Wyo.

2006 Systemwide Sales

\$272 million

Average Check \$6

Expansion Plans

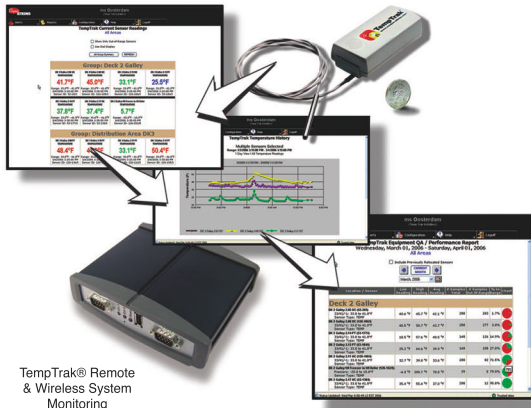
Undisclosed



When three Taco John's were hit by an E. coli outbreak last fall, the company put its crisis-management plan into action, which included frequent communication with operators about how to assure customers.



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Taco John's had begun a comprehensive vulnerability assessment in 2005—two years before an E. coli outbreak affected three of its units.

Another missing piece of the program was practice. "We planned to have a dry run and some on-site training," says Dixon. "It became on-the-job training. We could have been a lot more ready if we had a drill and practiced sending messages and knowing our roles."

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE



Brian Dixon, vice president of marketing for Cheyenne, Wyo.-based Taco John's, offers advice for crisis management.

- Plan that it will happen, so in case it does, you're ready.
- Make that planning comprehensive.
- Work on communication: who talks to whom and how.
- Make sure people know what their roles are.
- Practice.

Roles include a point person for managing communication and another for managing staff. According to Dixon, it took a few days for everyone to settle into their roles, noting a high level of anxiety, especially before the corporate office had adequate answers about the source of the E. coli.

After the Smoke Clears

The height of the crisis lasted about three weeks. After the organization got through it, its focus shifted to recovery. Sales at the affected units were hit "certainly by double digits," and the sales impact lessened as units got farther away. Taco John's used the media attention it was receiving, plus advertising and its own Web site, to assure customers and franchisees that its food is safe.

When Dixon spoke to *Chain Leader*, he was between a series of meetings debriefing the management team on the crisis. "It's not just a hand-wringing experience, when you think about all the nasty things that happened to customers and to businesses," he says. "It's, here's what we did right, here's what we made mistakes on, here's how we can improve, here's how we're going to be stronger to take better actions in the unlikely case something happens in the future." ■

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Whether it's over use of advertising dollars, vendor restrictions, perceived lack of service or possible termination, disputes between franchisees and franchisors are a fact of franchise life. "At times it's like a marriage or any long-term relationship—each side thinks they know more than the other," says L. Seth Stadfeld, franchise law attorney with Boston-based Weston, Patrick, Willard & Redding. Here are his tips on how to handle and defuse disputes when they arise.

● **Talk It Out.** Talk to other franchisees or a franchisee association first to get some perspective, suggests Stadfeld. Then approach the franchisor to explain your situation and ask for guidance or help. Try to work out your issue. Be sure you've read and understood the dispute-resolution clauses in your contract, especially those relating to "Choice of Law" (which state's laws apply), "Choice of Forum" (where the dispute will be resolved)

and any "Remedial Restrictions" on legal remedies available to you.

● **Meet in the Middle.** If you can't come to an agreement directly, try mediation, where both parties meet with their lawyers and a professional case-settler. "The idea is to have an independent, knowledgeable third party meet with both sides to find out the merits of their claims and their defenses, and try to find a way to solve the issue without wasting a lot of money in court," says Stadfeld. Usually the costs of mediation are split between the parties. Try to arrange the mediation in a neutral place, perhaps one that is equidistant between locations. Information on a Franchise Mediation Program sponsored by the International Franchise Association and the American Association of Franchisees & Dealers (AAFD) is available at www.cpradr.org.

● **Don't Strike.** In the heat of a dispute, do not threaten to stop paying royalties to the franchisor. "If you do a royalty strike, almost every court will say that the franchisor has a perfect right to terminate your contract," says Stadfeld. Stay in compliance with your agreement while the dispute is unfolding, and be sure to document your complaint and all correspondence relating to it.

● **Avoiding Battle.** If you approach the franchisor early and are able to reasonably document and explain your issue, you may be able to work out a solution and avoid getting involved in time-consuming and expensive legal action.



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MASTERMIND

Mazzio's John Kidwell merges science and entertainment as a stage hypnotist. **By Maya Norris**

John Kidwell has no intention of leaving Mazzio's Italian Eatery any time soon. He has been with the company for 33 years, starting out as a cook and working his way up to senior human resource consultant.

But should he decide he's had enough of the restaurant industry, he has a back-up career ready in stage hypnosis.

Kidwell has been a stage hypnotist since 1975. He performs two or three times a year at high schools, reunions and corporate parties, where he can get people to do things they normally wouldn't do. But Kidwell is quick to point out that although participants are highly suggestible under hypnosis, they will not do anything beyond their moral or physical capabilities. "One's physical capabilities can certainly surprise them," he says. "And then one's own morality is oftentimes what can make a show really fun, if you know what I mean. People will loosen up."

Open to Suggestions

Projecting a steady rhythm and pattern in his speech, Kidwell hypnotizes about 10 participants during his 90-minute routine. The subjects perform a variety of unusual actions

like using their shoes as cell phones and cuddling with the person in front of them, mistaking them for their favorite pillow.

And for those in the audience who are still not convinced that the participants were really hypnotized, Kidwell ends the show with a post-hypnotic suggestion. When he performs for high school seniors, he tells the participants they will transform into exotic dancers upon hearing the term "high school seniors." "The guys jump out of their seats, they get that glassy look in their eyes, and they start gyrating," he says. "It makes a believer out of anybody who thought the person wasn't hypnotized."

Art and Science

Kidwell became interested in hypnosis in 1973 when he took part in a 10-week health-sciences program at the University of Oklahoma medical school. He worked with a doctor doing research on physiological psychology, monitoring the sleep patterns of heroin addicts.

"In the process of hooking up the patient to the monitor, you learn to not necessarily induce hypnosis, but you learn techniques by which you can relax an individual. And relaxation from a physiological standpoint is in part helping one's brain to attain what we call the alpha brain-wave pattern," Kidwell explains. "Hypnosis is where the hypnotist helps the subject enter into an alpha brain-wave pattern and maintain that brain-wave-pattern state."

Kidwell then began studying hypnosis by reading about it, networking with stage hypnotists and attending their shows. He often entertained people informally at parties with hypnosis tricks. People eventually started asking him to perform at parties and other functions.

While Kidwell is fascinated with the science behind hypnosis, he also likes entertaining people with it. "I enjoy it from the standpoint of it makes people laugh. People have a good time. People have a chance to release," he says. "If anything were to happen to my career in the foodservice industry, I feel that I've got something that I could hang my hat on and still make a living at." ■

John Kidwell tests the depth of a hypnotic trance at the onset of hypnosis by having the subject's arm become as rigid as a steel bar. "Hypnosis fascinates me," he says. "It's the interplay of the mind and body."

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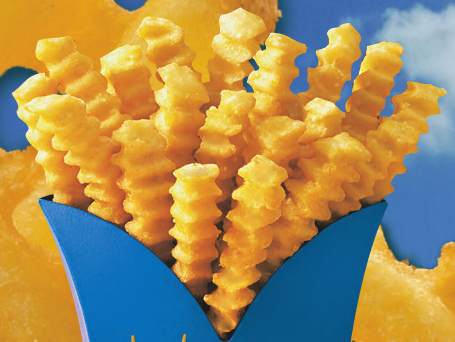
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^ Consumer Intercept Taste Study, April, 2006

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